

# February 20,2006 - State Emphasizes Inmate Rehab

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Joseph Fistrovich, chief financial officer for the department

MICHIGAN CITY, Ind. -- The Indiana Department of Correction is investing in programs to help inmates reintegrate into society after their release from prison in an initiative that prisoners' rights groups say is unprecedented.

Over the past two years, the state has added \$2.5 million to the department's budget for re-entry and work-release programs for inmates, said Joseph Fistrovich, chief financial officer for the department.

While overall staffing has not increased, the department has reclassified and shifted jobs within the department to focus more employees on community corrections duties that will help ex-cons adjust to life after prison, Fistrovich said.

"Obviously, if we can stop some of these (inmates) from coming back into the system, that saves us money," he said. "Hopefully, someday we won't need as many beds as we already have."

The state in recently years has had a 40 percent rate of recidivism within three years of release. At that rate, about 5,600 of the 14,000 inmates released last year by Indiana's prison system would return behind bars.

The Road to Re-Entry program announced in August by Correction Commission J. David Donahue tries to link offenders to community groups and state services that can help them get jobs and avoid lapsing back into criminal behavior.

It sounds like the sort of support system that prisoner advocates have been urging for decades, said Celia Sweet, president of the Indiana chapter of the national prisoner rights group Citizens United for Rehabilitation of Errants, or CURE.

"Re-entry is kind of a new animal around here," she said. "If the public knew what happens to these guys when they get out, they wouldn't believe it."

Richard Dobeski served 40 years in the state prison system. When he got out, he says, he got "\$75 and a pat on the back."

Dobeski was a teenager when he murdered a 6-year-old girl and her 3-year-old brother in the crawl space of his home in the affluent Lake Michigan community of Long Beach. He says he paid the price the state set.

"The prisons system in this state was about punishment and housing prisoners. There was no rehabilitation, no re-entry," he said.

Dobeski was fortunate to have a network of friends and family members to support him when he was released in 2003. Now living in Michigan City, he's staying out of trouble, but said other inmates who gain their release often have little support in finding jobs, a place to live, and counseling.

Sweet said more than 90 percent of prisoners will be freed, at least for a while, and everyone benefits if former inmates stay on the straight and narrow.

"These people are going to be your neighbors one day," she said. "Do you want them to be educated, or do you want them to be desperate? It's going to be worse for everyone if they're angry."

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### **About the Indiana Department of Correction**

The Department employs over 9,000 employees and houses over 23,000 adult offenders and more than 1,000 juveniles, in 33 facilities, ranging from minimum to maximum custody, prison camps, juvenile facilities and work release centers. The Department's home page on the Internet can be found at: <http://www.in.gov/indcorrection>.